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ABSTRACT

Predicated on the premise that social justice cannot be achieved without social action, that change does not occur without change agents, and that the only significant reforms in schools are those promoting social justice, it is argued that teachers who are reformers in education must be willing to pay their dues. Traditional approaches to reform are available so long as one remains within the bureaucratic structure, and not all rewards for promoting change are positive. On the whole, there are a few models to inspire students in education to become more oriented to reform. It is those involved in reform at the college level, however, who gain experiences to prepare them to be truly effective teachers. As a reform effort is a political act, reformers must recognize the risks of being perceived as different and the difficulty of bridging the gap between rhetoric and implementation. The emphasis on job security in education and a surplus supply of teachers lessens the attractiveness of challenging the educational status quo. If one wishes, therefore, to be a reformer, one will pay some dues both personally and professionally. While not everything that happens to the reformer is necessarily negative, hard work and frustration must be expected. (Author/KSM)

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PAYING ONE'S DUES*

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This paper is predicated on the premise that social justice cannot be achieved without social action. Change does not occur without change agents. It is further predicated on the belief that the only significant reforms in schools--as in society--are those that promote social justice. This is not to denigrate modest curricular reforms or other types of changes that are needed. But the ideas presented here stand or fall on the conviction that no curricular or organizational changes in schools are worthwhile if they do not contribute to a truly open, democratic society. Some teachers who engage in social action--whether it be in environmental education, school politics or curricular change--are contributing to that type of society. Those persons have joined the fight against racism, sexism and corruption and they seek to make schools both an influence in and a model for the community; they can teach us much. But many of us are still grappling with our beliefs and this essay may clarify why that is the case.

While these remarks are addressed to social studies teachers, they are applicable to educators at any point or level in the profession--including student teachers. It is for this reason that the discussion moves back and forth from college to public school illustrations. The values we act on as teachers are not fully a consequence of either our college training or our public school experiences. Our roots are far more complex, buried deep in cultural, societal and familial patterns. For our purposes, however, it is

*Presented at the National Council for the Social Studies, San Francisco, November 24, 1973. Others sharing the podium will be social studies teachers who have truly "paid their dues." This paper provides one possible context for our discussion.

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sufficient to deal with some aspects of our training and of our work as teachers.

While the term "reformer" permeates the discussion, other terms would also be appropriate: "urban educator," "innovator," "change agent" or "social actionist". Whatever the title, the tone of my remarks may suggest that reformers are "good" and people opposed to reform must be "bad". Dichotomizations of this type are seldom useful and never accurate and this particular conclusion is not my intent. But I do believe that we desperately need many mo reformers and social actionists in education, and in that sense I confess to being a proselytizer.

I cannot encourage persons to become involved in educational reform or social action, however, without discussing the rewards and risks involved. To urge people to rally under the flag of reform without dealing with sacrifices to be made would be irresponsible. It would be equally irresponsible to argue that those who have "the word" need no warnings and that they will to forth and do Biblical things. Both of these extremes are bereft of guidance to those wondering where on the reform scale they may fall. We are concerned here with what most of us in education <u>are</u> willing and <u>are not</u> willing to do. That being the case, urging us to be supermen has little pay-off. It is not in the nature of most public school or university people to be revolutionary--beyond the verbal level. It will be useful, therefore, to examine what one can expect if one becomes a reformer. One may be happy in this role, but one will also have to pay some dues. There is no way of escaping that fact.

<u>Rewards Within The System</u>

Beginning on an uplifting note, educational systems positively sanction innovators who improve the system. To assume that one cannot improve the preparation of teachers or the organization of schools by working within the system is nonsense. School systems like most social systems will permit a degree of innovation. Their survival depends on some adjustments to changing

social conditions and on professional breakthroughs. The fact that the pace of change is very slow is not the issue here. The point is that schools and school people are changing, as are all other aspects of our society. The rate of change can please no one truly concerned with what needs to be done. For some, of course, the rate of change is already much too fast. But we are concerned here with those more open to reality. Let us outline some traditiona within the system--approaches to reform.

These approaches are well defined and are solid parts of the educational establishment. Major school systems, for example, offer a variety of in-service workshops to encourage people to consider new approaches. School systems sponsor pilot projects which make possible experiments with new materia or forms or organization. School systems have persons in the supervisory ranks who are charged with leadership for change and who can be of help to teachers. Similarly, schools of education have clusters of professors amenable to working with students on change and reform in the teacher preparati process.

One will find principals who are supportive of change. Indeed, some principals candidly confess that the bane of their existence is the pausity of teachers receptive to change and reform. The other side of this coin is even more familiar to us. And we should not forget teachers' organizati which will support certain reforms--if they do not challenge the bread and butter goals of these organizations.

In short, there are a variety of avenues for improving educational practices within the system, so long as one remains within the bureaucratic structure. But one should not assume that because such avenues exist most teachers and administrators are change-oriented or eager to participate. Some people explore these avenues because they are indeed concerned with change and seek new approaches. Other people participate because it is "the thing to do,

or because they are paid to do it, or because they are asked to participate and cannot get out of it. To assume, then, that these change mechanisms are necessarily effective would be missing the point. These mechanisms exist and should be utilized. In most cases, however, they are as plodding as the bureaucracies of which they are a part.

Nonetheless, a degree of innovation is absolutely necessary to the health of any school system. A certain percentage of innovators, therefore, is desirable and will be rewarded by the system. It may be useful to define what is meant by an innovator. In essence, an innovator is one who accepts the basic goals of the public schools but is also concerned with ways of improving instructional practices. He/she is not a revolutionary in any sense of the word. The innovator is not interested in changing the system fundamentally or overthrowing it. Rather, he/she seeks ways to make things better--and expects to remain on the payroll and to get a gold watch some years in the future.

In most schools there will be one or two teachers who have the reputation for always being into new things. They are the teachers who seem to be most excited by working with kids or who relish new approaches to their subject matter. They may be teachers concerned with student rights and they believe that rules need to be made more fair or humane. They may be teachers who participate in professional activities because they believe the profession as a whole needs uplifting. Whatever their cause, the number of such innovators is never large. While little emperical evidence exists on the number of innovators in the profession, the work which has been done suggests that the percentage is not high. An estimate of perhaps five or ten percent is probably an overstatement.

One of the dysfunctions of innovation is that the innovator may be rewarde in ways that will temper innovative drives. Educational systems do not hav many ways to reward people other than promotion. Salaries are pretty much determined by one's years of experience and the number of degrees one holds.

Thus, only two other reward mechanisms exist: public acknowledgement of a person's innovative efforts or promotion. Public acknowledgement is certainly an appropriate mechanism, but it is transitory. Promotion carries with it higher status, more money, and an opportunity to influence the direction of the system. At least the latter is often cited as a motivation for promotion.* Once one is promoted, however, whether it be to a department chairmanship, to an assistant principalship, or to some other supervisory post, one's innovativeness at the classroom level is diminished. As has often been argued, those who probably have the most to offer kids may be promoted and will no longer work with kids. But what about the innovator's influence on the system at a higher level?

There are, of course, innovators in the upper ranks. But the rituals of bureaucratic decision-making vitiate the drive and ideas that may have been inspiring at the school level. And the test of educational reform is the degree to which it is reflected in the day-to-day life of kids and teachers. Whenever an effective teacher is promoted, the quality of what goes on in the life of certain classrooms is diminished. Hence, be a good teacher and you may get ahead. But once you're promoted, be prepared for the fact that the upper reaches of school systems (and universities) are not hotbeds of innovation--and that is putting it kindly.

I am not suggesting that everyone who is promoted is an innovator. There are as many reasons for promotion as there are for hiring people in the first place. Slots have to be filled, degrees have to be held, friendship patterns and "inside tracks" will determine who is destined for greatness, and on and on. All that is being suggested is that <u>some</u> persons are promoted because they have shown a degree of concern for reform and change in the schools. Hurray for them, but let us not over-generalize who makes it to the top. We are all

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*The number of Ph.D. applicants, for example, who indicate they desire the advanced degree because, once they have it, "people will listen to them," is both sad and unrealistic.

familiar with the Peter Principle, which is certainly amusing and has about as much power of prediction as some of the generalizations being made here. Some persons are indeed promoted to their level of incompetence; but they perhaps equalize those who are promoted for "good" reasons, i.e., those who have been innovative and progressive at the classroom level.

Innovation and Teacher Education

Let us turn, however, to the more negative aspects of paying one's dues within the system. The process of playing it safe and not becoming involved is inculcated in most of us throughout life. That point hardly needs explicati Teacher preparation programs certainly contribute to the inculcation of playing it safe modes of behavior. There is simply no question that the majority of students and professors in schools of education are not going to become involve in reform efforts. Schools of education are like most public schools: filled with many hard-working teachers and largely docile students trapped by traditio expectations, practices and curricula that limit the potential of both groups. I reluctantly conclude that wallowing in a sea of non-involvement in reform throughout the preparation process is realistic training for what one can expec in the schools.

Worst of all, the number of models who would inspire students to become more oriented to reform is not large. The number of reformers at any level of education is simply not large--rhetoric to the contrary. Reformers constitu a minority in any educational system, and they share some of the same difficult experienced by all minority groups in institutions. They will stand out, they will be viewed as being different, they will not be trusted and they will be blamed for anything they do that is not exemplary. They will also lead public lives and will generate both the accolades and brick-bats of public life. All apsects of this drama are visible in any teacher preparation program, as they are in any public school.

I am convinced that persons who become involved in reform at the college level will reap life-long benefits. They will gain experiences that will prepare them to be truly effective teachers in the schools. They will learn first-hand all of the excitement, strategies, victories and defeats of implementing new ideas. Since that process is the very essence of truly vital educational programs, no better training for teaching can be experienced than through engaging in reform itself. Reformers are also likely to work with handfuls of other dedicated persons. They will develop friendships that go beyond the superficialities of classroom attendance. They are also likely to know a few teachers with whom they will share the elations and tears of social action. The relevance of their training and their interpersonal relations will be far more intensive and meaningful than is the case where one merely does what one is supposed to do. The skills reformers learn and the depth of involvements they experience may well alter basic views of life and society.

But it will not take long for reformers to recognize that others perceive them as being different. Some people will applaud them. They may even be encouraged to join in. But others will view them as bothersome, uppity, flakey, and "too advanced" and even as unpatriotic. Reformers are quickly branded as trouble-makers who upset the routines of what universities and schools are all about.

But this is to be expected. Reform efforts are political acts, and politics is not a quiet business. It is in the nature of reform that one's work with some groups may alienate others. This is inevitable as one makes public statements, meets with decision-makers, and urges others to join the cause. And in all such activities, there will be winners and losers; yeas and nays will be cast. In short, reform is permeated with the vitality of social action.

The reformer must be prepared to win and lose, with all of the social-psychological dynamics involved. Some persons thrive on the highs of reform.

Others assume that reformers must always win and will quit as soon as Plan A does not carry the day. They do not recognize that Plan A must be backed by Plan B, and that Plan C may be the only one with any hope of success. In this complex process, reformers soon learn a great deal about themselves, their peers and their mentors. They learn "where they are at"in relation to a range of people and issues. Some of what they learn will encourage them to continue their work. Much of what they learn may well discourage them from going any further.

They will certainly learn that most people in education are not willing to take any risks. By risks I do not mean anything physical nor anything very revolutionary. I am merely suggesting that the majority of us are unwilling to get involved in the hard work of reform. Many professors, for example, assume that if a meeting or two is held on a given issue, the matter is resolve It is part of the myopia of academics that a tremendous importance is placed on words. Some of us assume that if <u>something</u> is stated by <u>someone</u> in <u>some place</u> or at <u>some time</u>, the world will tremble. There is almost a complete non-recognition of the fantastic gap between rhetoric and the hard work of implementation.

Reformers are those who deal with that gap. They also utilize rhetoric but recognize that speeches are tools for marshalling support or for stating positions. But beyond the podium are all of the meetings, publications, actions and intrigues that make up reform.

All of this takes time--and that is where exhortations of this type will break down. The reformer is one who must put much time into a range of activities, far more time than most school and university people are willing to give. One cannot become deeply involved in reform efforst without it influencing one's personal life. And what are some personal characteristics of the typical education student? Must persons in schools of education are about twenty years of age. Some have broken away from home is the sense that

they live in an apartment or in a dormitory. Many others, however, are still living at home. They are much involved in the maturation process, at that vague juncture where youth and adulthood merge. Our culture does not provide a rite of passage that determines when one leaves childish ways and becomes an adult. The eighteen year old may be legislatively defined as an adult, but eighteen is as much a legal fiction as the more traditional twenty-one. Twenty-year olds on the verge of completing their college careers are finding themselves, are defining relationships, and are seeking whom they are going to live with or marry--and this is all certainly a normal part of life. These facts do not encourage one to take chances with one's education, especially if that education is a means to a career. Similarly, delineating the effects of one mate, two children, a mortgage and car payments on the typical thirty-year teacher seems hardly necessary since most of us have been there or will be ther All of these family and personal pressures will coalesce to limit involvements in reform. Reformers have to deal with the values and pulls of parents, wives, husbands, girlfriends, or boyfriends who may not share their views.

Given these and other factors, it is apparent that most students in schools of education, like teachers, can control their passion for reform. While the encouragement of reform is the goal of this discussion, it is a Quixotian goal. The realities of college life and of married life say otherwis But it is no attacking of windmills to argue that one <u>can</u> increase the percenta of teachers who respond to this message. It is an abysmally low percentage now; any increase will be a step forward.

I believe we can all agree, then, that becoming a reformer alters one's personal life. The time, energy and psychic drive one gives to reform will

be mirrored in the faces of those with whom one spends his time. Unless one is lucky enough to have a spouse--family--or friends--who share one's zeal, one is likely to hang back. Unless one is working with a group of persons who can support one in the highs and lows of social action, the while business can be a drag.

Prices and Principles

Reformers are not perfect, and one of their imperfections is that they seek to live by their principles. The trouble with seeking to live by one's principles is that it puts one in conflict with others living by their principles. The reformer will have to ask himself questions such as the following: Do I really have ideas that are going to make things better? Am I really attempting to help people or do I want power over people? How do I really know that the things I am working toward are better than what is going on in the schools now? What right have I got to argue that what has been done in schools for generations is no longer appropriate? And on and on. But facing these questions is what distinguishes the reformer from his colleagues. He/she <u>is</u> questioning; he/she <u>is</u> seeking answers; he/she <u>is</u> attempting to find new approaches and better ways. Reformers add a vitality to society; they are more dynamic than those who also live by other principles and seldom question them. Bertrand Russell once argued that liberals have to be more intelligent than conservatives. That is, the liberal (or reformer in our context) must not only know all that the conservative knows, but must also push beyond the limits of the status quo.

It is in the process of questioning that our hope for better ways and a more humane education lie. Those who accept things as they are, or who decry all of the change and ferment about them, or who wish for the "good old days," or who fall back on authoritarian principles, are far more dangerous than the reformers. The reformers may not be on the right track; they may not have the best ideas in any given situation--but at least they are probing. The health

of any social system is dependent on the probers. Those who fall back on the status quo may indeed protect the social system from outside influences or from internal troubles. But an unwillingness to change only increases tensions and, in the end, shatters the status quo ever more profoundly. Biologica organisms that respond, that seek to adjust, that change themselves to meet changing needs are those that survive. The same is true of teachers and school

The final point here is the most obvious. Is there any danger that becoming involved in reform may cause one to lose one's job, or in the case of the student teacher, to blemish one's college career? Will the reformer get good recommendations? Are reformers likely to get fired? How can reformers survive in the crowded teachers market? The answers to all of these questions are a "clear-cut" yes and no. If one goes about one's reform efforts carefully, and with the support of others, it is unlikely that one is going to be seriously punished. On the contrary, some changes will be applauded.

But this is begging the question. Can one lose his/her job by becoming too deeply involved in reform? The answer must be yes. And that is the reason why so many persons avoid becoming involved in reform. This has always been true in education, a profession strongly characterized by a search for security. Teachers generally share the goals of most civil servants: to be hired, to pass a probationary period and to achieve life-long job security, barring truly catastrophic events such as serious depressions. The search for security is being accellerated in this period when we have a surplus of teachers. With many people competing for the lessened number of teaching positions, it is likely that they will be even more careful of not stepping on someone's toes and of not being publicly identified with causes or change effor

Long before they enter schools of education, most people have learned that teachers are not supposed to be politically active, that they should not be too far ahead of the community and that they should not become involved in public affairs. Teacher militancy over the past decade has not wiped clean

the traditions of hundreds of years. Certainly, we have come a long way from the time when teachers could not smoke in public and had to attend church in the community in which they taught. Nonetheless, the tradition of teachers "knowing their place" is still very much with us. Part of this can be explained by the fact that three-quarters of all teachers are women, and women have been taught to "know their place" in society. The growing awareness of sexism and the beginnings of militancy on the part of women are without doubt two of the most important trends in our society, and they have very positive implications for education. But docility is equally pervasive among male teachers. The number of boat-rockers in the profession has never been large. While it appears to have increased over the decade, the basic ethic of the profession has not been shattered.

To sum up, if one wishes to be a reformer, one is going to pay some dues both personally and professionally. I have attempted to make clear that not everything that happens to the reformer is necessarily negative. But to suggest that reform is a straight-ahead--onward and upward--victory will be ours--type of activity is nonsense. It is hard work. It is frustrating. It tends to separate one from one's peers. And one has to be an unusual person to become involved in it. But since we all believe that we are unique, it is just possible that a growing number of teachers, student teachers and professors will be willing to nurture this uniqueness by becoming active in the reform movement.

Those who do not will be paying their dues in still another way. They are so concerned with fitting in, in adjusting to what is, and in doing what they are supposed to do, that their lives are mapped out for them. Reformers are willing to make some changes on maps. But the majority of persons in education appear to be committed to sticking to established roles and following established roadways. That's too bad, but that's the way it is. And that is why we need more reformers: people who are willing to pay some dues not only for themselves, but also for those who make up most of the profession.